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ABSTRACT

Preservice peer coaching is a collegial relationship between student teachers who provide reciprocal, in-class assistance to one another as they attempt to incorporate new teaching skills, strategies, and approaches into their teaching. The typical peer-coaching cycle includes a preview conference, during which the student teachers discuss the focus of the upcoming lesson; observation of the lesson by the student teacher coach; and a follow-up conference, during which the student teachers analyze the lesson. Peer coaching facilitates the recall of skills and strategies from methodology classes, fosters collegiality, and promotes reflection on teaching. Effective use of peer coaching requires training in interacting as both coach and recipient of coaching. Supervising teachers also need to be introduced to the goals, procedures, and benefits of peer coaching. Problems inherent in preservice peer coaching include increased time requirements involved in the coaching cycle, increased time involvement of university personnel, development of unhealthy competitiveness, and student teachers' lack of confidence in giving constructive feedback. (Contains 17 references.) (JDD)

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# Peer Coaching in Teacher Education

Gloria A. Neubert
Lois T. Stover

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For three years, the authors have studied preservice peer coaching. They thank the supervising teachers and students involved in the pilot studies and are especially grateful for the support and insights of their colleagues, Elizabeth McAllister, Maggie Madden, and James Binko.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

# Peer Coaching in Teacher Education

by
Gloria A. Neubert
and
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## What Is Preservice Peer Coaching?

In the past decade, hundreds of classroom teachers have been introduced to coaching. The literature abounds with reports of teachers who have been helped through participation in coaching to use new approaches more skillfully, appropriately, and frequently (Baker and Showers 1984; Neubert 1988; Brandt 1989; Strother 1989*a*, *b*; Neubert and Binko 1992). Most of these reports conclude that peer-coaching arrangements have been enthusiastically embraced by teachers.

Coaching originally was introduced by Joyce and Showers (1980) as a component of inservice training for experienced teachers. Studies have shown that peer coaching is effective in helping teachers to apply new skills and strategies in their classrooms, to develop a sense of collegiality and professionalism, and to assume a reflective stance toward their teaching.

Peer coaching also is an effective practice for preservice teacher education. Preservice peer coaching is a collegial relationship between student teachers who provide reciprocal, in-class assistance to one another as they attempt to incorporate new teaching skills, strategies, and approaches into their teaching.

The typical peer-coaching cycle includes: 1) a preview conference, during which the student teachers discuss the focus of the upcoming lesson; 2) the observation of the lesson by the student teacher coach; and 3) a follow-up conference, during which the student teachers ana-

lyze the completed lesson. Following is a scene that illustrates this process.

Carol and Suzanne are student teachers assigned to the same middle school. They have been visiting each other's classes for several weeks, working in a peer-coaching arrangement. On this day, Suzanne is serving as the coach; on other occasions, Carol serves as Suzanne's coach. The two student teachers previewed Carol's lesson draft before she taught a lesson that involved students in discussing a novel. Carol and Suzanne discussed the essential attributes of a successful discussion, and they decided that Suzanne would observe Carol's class and focus her observations on Carol's ability to facilitate a class discussion. Suzanne made the following notes as she observed Carol's lesson.

Lesson: *Father's Arcane Daughter*
Skill/Strategy Focus: Student Discussion
Grade 6

*Praise*

1. Your timing was excellent. Because you had students read only one chapter, they had significant time to discuss in depth.
2. You tried to stay out of the discussion as much as possible and let the students feel autonomous with their reader response. Yet it was obvious through your smiling, eye contact, and occasional enthusiastic comments that you were listening to each reaction and were truly interested in their responses.
3. I was particularly impressed with the students' higher-level thinking, which resulted from your eliciting questions. Excellent choices! And the students also asked each other and you such higher-order questions. They modeled your asking, "Why do you think that?" or "Give us some evidence from the story." They did an excellent job of "revisiting the text."

*Questions*

1. Hadn't you planned on reviewing the rules for this discussion prior to the beginning? For example, each questioner would have a specific time limit.
2. Is there a way to make the students more comfortable in front of the class? (Michael was so nervous when he came "front and center" to ask his questions.)
3. Do you think it would be too "dangerous" to teach these students how to play "devil's advocate"?

After the lesson, Suzanne used her notes to discuss the lesson with Carol during a reflective debriefing conference.

Teachers tend to embrace peer coaching as a collegial activity because it excludes the evaluation component of observation from the professional growth process; provides camaraderie to the teachers from an "equal," especially as they find themselves experiencing the disequilibrium of a learner; reduces the isolation of teaching; builds communities of teacher-learners; and encourages a new sense of professionalism.

Peer coaching involves a dialogue for seeking underlying rationales, considering alternatives and consequences, and formulating hypotheses – all components of reflection (Roth and Adler 1985). Participants examine and raise questions about their teaching and that of their coaching partners. Teachers do not just teach lessons, they also analyze the lessons and their own work by asking what was successful, why it was successful, and what could be done differently. Such a reflective posture empowers teachers to become lifelong learners and theory builders in their own classrooms.

# Incorporating Peer Coaching into Preservice Programs

Peer coaching should be introduced during student teaching or even earlier in the teacher education sequence. This will allow future teachers to develop skills that will serve them throughout their professional careers. Peer coaching also will facilitate the recall of skills and strategies from methodology classes, foster collegiality, and promote reflection on teaching.

## Recalling Skills and Strategies

Students leave campus programs and enter student teaching armed with extensive pedagogical knowledge; however, much of this knowledge remains untapped during a typical student teaching experience. Peer coaching during student teaching provides opportunities for two student teachers to discuss their teaching, which facilitates recall of instructional strategies. For example, in Carol's planning conference, Suzanne asked, "Do you remember when Dr. N. demonstrated the jigsaw strategy? Would that work in your lesson to encourage participation and cover a great deal of information?"

Prior to this conference, neither Suzanne nor Carol had attempted to use the cooperative learning strategy called "jigsaw." In fact, both reported that, prior to this conversation, the strategy had not occurred to them, nor had they seen their supervising teachers use the strate-

gy. The dialogue that occurs during planning, the act of reflecting in writing during the lesson observation, and the discussion during the debriefing conference all facilitate the recall of pedagogical skills and strategies.

## Fostering Collegiality

"Collegiality," "collaboration," "networking," "teaming" – all are terms that recur in the literature of school reform. Ideal schools for the 21st century will free teachers from the traditional isolation of their classrooms and encourage them to collaborate in order to support their common professional growth and the enhancement of educational programs.

Teacher preparation institutions have a responsibility to develop a collegial disposition among preservice teachers. Making peer coaching an integral part of teacher education exposes preservice teachers to a widely used staff development model and launches them into their teaching careers with an expectation that teaching can and should be a collaborative activity.

## Promoting Reflection

Learning to teach involves cognitive engagement. Unfortunately, too often the student teacher is merely the passive recipient of feedback from a supervising teacher. Such expository conferences provide opportunities for the supervisors to reflect on the teaching they have observed, but time seldom is provided for the student teacher to do an in-depth self-analysis; nor do supervising teachers typically encourage such reflection.

Expository conferencing occurs when supervising teachers assume that their role is that of the expert, whose responsibility is to tell the novice what was effective and ineffective in the lesson and how to improve. Sometimes reflection is not encouraged because it is foreign to a supervising teacher's own planning-teaching cycles or be-

cause questioning by student teachers may be perceived as threatening. Often, reflection simply does not occur because supervisors are overworked, and reflective conferencing takes more time than expository conferencing.

Without encouragement and practice in reflection, student teachers do not automatically engage in reflection as a part of their teaching cycle. Peer coaching ensures that preservice teachers have opportunities to construct meaning about their teaching through engaging in reflective dialogue with a peer.

## Field Experience and Student Teaching

Although varying in configuration, the preservice teacher's university schedule usually includes a regular course sequence coupled with time spent observing, aiding, or teaching in the schools. Peer coaching has been used successfully in conjunction with such courses to introduce this collegial strategy and to give teacher education students opportunities for reflection during their first teaching attempts (Neubert and McAllister 1993; McAllister and Neubert 1994; Wynn 1994).

During this phase, students are assigned in pairs to the same school. They coach each other when they are aiding or teaching with the goal of helping one another to apply specific strategies that they have studied in the college classroom. For example, after instruction on cooperative learning strategies, preservice teachers may be required to use cooperative learning in at least one of the lessons they teach during their field experience. Through this type of peer coaching, termed technical peer coaching by Garmston (1987), preservice teachers gain two opportunities to engage in reflection on cooperative learning – on their own as students and collegially as practitioners.

More extensive peer coaching opportunities are possible during the student-teaching semester (Pavelich 1992; Neubert and Stover 1993; Neubert, Stover, and Binko 1994). As with peer coaching during field experiences, student teachers are assigned in pairs to the same school

and, possibly, to the same supervising teacher. Partners then coach one another one or two times each week, using the three-part strategy of preview conference, observation, and reflective conference.

## Training Student Teachers for Peer Coaching

Before future teachers can participate in peer coaching, they need to be trained in interacting as both coach and recipient of coaching. Following are topics for training:

### The Concept of Peer Coaching

Teacher education students can be introduced to the definition, history, and purposes of peer coaching by an experienced trainer. Fastback 277 *Improving Teaching Through Coaching* provides useful introductory reading. The introduction should be followed by a discussion of peer coaching as a process that offers support and encouragement in context-specific ways. If possible, experienced peer coaches should be invited to discuss what they gained from the process. Once students understand the concept of peer coaching, they can brainstorm what they perceive to be possible benefits and pitfalls of peer coaching and can describe what they hope to achieve through serving as a peer-coaching partner.

Effective peer coaching depends on trust. Preservice teachers must understand that working with a partner to build professional skills means trusting that partner to be sensitive to matters of confidentiality and being similarly trustworthy in return. The "fishbowl" of observation and feedback can be abused if students do not understand the professional ethics involved in collegial coaching.

## Skill and Strategy Focus

The coach's job is to provide feedback on a specific teaching skill or strategy within a specific context. Thus the teacher must decide, with the coach's help, what the focus of the observation will be.

During training, for instance, a trainer might ask the trainees to imagine that they are going to do a jigsaw cooperative learning strategy, asking their students to process information from their textbooks about the various groups that settled America's western frontier during the late 1800s. What kinds of teaching skills might a peer coach look for when observing such a lesson? Trainees would then brainstorm specific instructional strategies that might be observed in the lesson.

Sometimes, it is useful for peer coaches to develop a "skill application form" with their partner as a way of recording the observation of specific skills. Such a form should include the focus skill or strategy and a way of noting its application. For example, if the skill is using positive feedback, the form might contain three columns in which the observer records the teacher's uses of positive, negative, and neutral feedback. If increasing total class participation is the instructional focus, the form might simply be a student seating chart and the observer would put a mark by a student's name each time that student contributed to the class discussion. After the observation, the coach would share the form with the peer teacher during the reflective conference.

The act of creating an observation instrument tied to a particular lesson helps both student teachers reflect on the lesson goal and the skills needed to achieve that goal. When the partners participate in creating the form and the form is well-designed, then the job of the coach becomes easier during the reflective conference, because the coach can share the collected data and the teacher can then make his or her own judgments.

Preservice teachers also need to be taught that once a focus for a lesson is determined, they should discuss the essential characteristics

of the skill or strategy with their partners. For example, if the focus is effective use of directed reading, students should review the use of motivation, background development, prediction, etc. This mutual review of the essential attributes will assist the teacher in teaching an effective lesson and the coach in writing valid comments about the use of the strategy.

Student teaching partners also can determine the skills they want their coaches to observe by completing a self-assessment review of feedback received on previous lesson plans or field experiences to seek out strengths and weaknesses. After completing this self-analysis, students can work with their partners to create a list of skills that they would like to be observed using. This activity asks students to reflect on what they know about themselves and about the teaching act, and it provides a starting point for the coaching.

## Reflective Conferencing Techniques

Reflective conferencing in peer coaching must be non-directive. The coach's job is to provide data and to help the teacher begin to use that data to reflect on and revise his or her teaching strategies and lesson plans. The teacher must retain ownership of the lesson in order for growth to occur. If the coach uses a directive approach, the teacher will tend to shift ownership and responsibility to the coach; and reflection on the part of the teacher will not occur.

Reflective conferencing should take place as soon as possible after the lesson is taught. The teacher and coach tend to forget how the lesson felt once they are too removed from it, and they also forget the specific words and actions of both teacher and students.

An effective way to begin a reflective conference is for the coach to ask the teacher, "What do you think were the positive aspects of your lesson? Why were these elements effective?" After the teacher reflects on these questions, the coach might ask, "What might you do to change the lesson – either to improve it or for the sake of variety – if you were going to teach it again?" Once more, the teacher

reflects and responds. If a skill application form was used, this is often a good point in the conference for the coach to share it with the teacher.

Usually the prompting questions from the coach and the responses from the teacher lead naturally into a conversation about the lesson and specifically about the selected focus. Coaches should be trained to shape their feedback to the teacher in the form of praise and non-directive questions, which can be categorized as clarifying, eliciting, or leading.

*Praise* involves telling the teacher specifically what the coach perceived as strengths of the lesson and why. Following are examples of appropriate praise statements:

- I am so impressed that you internalized your plan so well. You obviously reviewed and rehearsed this. As a result, the transitions flowed well.
- The quality of the transparency and the dark room really helped you focus the attention of this group of students.
- You offered positive reinforcement in a number of ways today – much growth here since I last observed. You made statements like, "You're doing a really nice job developing your idea" and "Keep this up."

*Clarifying questions* are questions the coach asks because the coach is genuinely unsure about something that took place during the lesson. The coach is aware that the teacher may have a valid reason for a decision and thus uses this kind of question to help the teacher articulate or refine the decision-making process. Following are examples of clarifying questions:

- On your lesson plan, you used a different purpose for viewing. Why did you change it when you began showing the film?
- Can students ask any peer to respond with them?
- I noticed the girl in the corner was not reading the assigned text. Why was she doing something different from the rest of the group?

In the last instance, the teacher may have chosen to assign the student a different text; or the teacher may not have noticed that the student in question was off task.

*Eliciting questions* are questions the coach asks in order to prompt the teacher to explore options. Asking the question is not meant to imply that the coach feels the teacher's choice of strategy was a mistake. The question is designed merely to encourage the teacher to investigate all the possibilities before choosing one. Such eliciting questions also attempt to stimulate recall of alternative strategies learned during methodology courses. Following are examples that illustrate this concept:

- How else might you have grouped the students to encourage more of them to participate?
- What other strategies could you have used to present the vocabulary?
- Can you think of another way that you could have introduced the concept of prejudice?

*Leading questions* are actually suggestions. But, rather than offering these suggestions didactically, the coach phrases them in question form. Thus the teacher is invited to reflect on the suggestion without feeling that it must be accepted. Also, it is possible that the teacher's response may indicate that the coach's incomplete knowledge of the classroom context invalidates the suggestion. For instance, one coach asked, "Do you think anyone in the class will resent the individual attention you gave Sally while the rest of them were playing a game?" The teacher's reply indicated an important reason for the decision; Sally had been absent, and the teacher was using time when other students were engaged in a reinforcement activity to help her catch up. Here are some examples of leading questions:

- Could you have tried the cooperative learning signal before sanctioning them for talking?

- Do you think the students would have gotten more out of the film if they had a purpose for viewing that related to the previous reading?
- What would have happened if your mini-lesson today had been your modeling of poetry writing?

Trainees can practice praising and questioning by categorizing and rewriting excerpts from transcripts of coaching conferences. The trainer also might arrange to have his or her own coach observe the training session. Then, near the end of the session, the coach and the trainer can model a reflective conference.

Finally, the participants as a group can watch a segment of a videotaped lesson by a preservice teacher and, with the guidance of the trainer, practice observing and writing statements of praise and questions. Then the trainees can practice sharing that information with a partner, using an appropriate non-directive, reflective format.

## Training Supervising Teachers

Supervising teachers need to understand both the nature of the coaching process and their role in it; therefore, supervising teachers should be brought together as a group and introduced to the goals, procedures, and benefits of peer coaching. The training sequence outlined previously for the peer coaches can be adapted for use with the supervising teachers.

Additionally, if supervising teachers are working in a program that places two student teachers in one classroom, they also need to be introduced to the benefits and difficulties associated with this model. Also, if student teachers are coaching in the context of a field-experience course and are required by the university instructor to teach and coach using specific approaches they have studied in class, then the supervising teacher needs to be aware of such assignments.

Supervising teachers need to be sensitized to the time requirement for successful peer coaching, so that they can assist preservice teachers in scheduling places and times to complete the coaching cycle. Because coaching is inherently time-consuming, each student teacher should be expected to assume only a portion of the supervising teacher's class load. For example, in a middle school, if the supervising teacher has five sections each day and has two student teachers, each student should take over two sections and team-teach a third with the peer coach. If the peer coaches are assigned in the more traditional model to different supervising teachers, the student teacher

should assume responsibility for only three of the classes. Such arrangements will allow for student teachers to coach each other once or twice a week.

Training supervising teachers to model coaching is the most important aspect of their preparation. Supervising teachers need to follow the same procedures that coaches use, employing the praising and questioning strategies that are designed to generate reflection on practice.

## The Coaching Cycle in Action

It is helpful for the student teachers to become comfortable with the classes and their supervising teacher before peer coaching begins. Thus the peer coaching cycle should begin a few weeks after the start of the field experience.

*Preview Conference.* The coaching cycle begins with the preservice teacher presenting and discussing the planned lesson with his or her coach. Based on the teacher's description of his or her objectives for the day and the outline of activities provided, the teacher and coach together select a focus. Once the focus for the observation has been articulated, the partners decide what, specifically, the coach will observe and what the coach will record during the lesson. In a concept attainment lesson, for instance, the coach might observe whether or not the examples of the concept were accurate. On the other hand, in a lesson in which students are working with partners on a review activity and the skill focus is "time on task," the coach may record the number of times students are observed in off-task behaviors.

After thorough discussion with the coach, the teacher presents the lesson to the supervising teacher for review of both the plan itself and the articulation of the focus for the observation. The supervising teacher should provide feedback on the lesson in its written form using the praise and question strategies.

*Lesson Observation.* The teacher implements the lesson while the coach observes. The coach watches the lesson, using the skill appli-

cation form, if appropriate, and recording praise and questions. The coach's presence in the classroom should not preclude the supervising teacher from also observing at this time. Supervising teachers should follow their normal observation regimen.

*Reflective Conference*. The student teacher first meets alone with the coach for a reflective conference, which should take place as soon after the teaching as possible. Then a debriefing is conducted with the supervising teacher. The coach may be present at the debriefing, depending on the schedules and wishes of all three. Both coach and teacher can benefit from the supervising teacher's comments and questions. However, if the supervising teacher confers with the teacher first, the teacher and coach may feel as though what they have to say, as novices, is less important than what the supervising teacher has to say. Both coach and supervising teacher should confer with the teacher using the reflective conference strategies outlined previously, keeping in mind that the student teacher should not be the passive recipient of expository information about his or her lesson. Their goal is to nurture the student teacher's ability to reflect on the lesson and, as a result, to take responsibility for the lesson.

## Benefits of Preservice Peer Coaching

The benefits of preservice peer coaching appear to parallel the benefits of inservice peer coaching in three areas: 1) planning and application, 2) collegial support, and 3) reflection.

### Planning and Application

Preservice teachers report that the frequent sharing of ideas when planning their lessons is a primary benefit of peer coaching. The following are two typical comments, excerpted from student teachers' journals:

> My coach has given me some of the finest questions/suggestions. He is very perceptive and innovative. For example, my supervising teacher wanted me to review form-class words in *one* period. My partner understood my frustration and came to school with a solution. We created a jigsaw activity in which the students taught each other; and it worked brilliantly.

> Every day we brainstorm ideas and ask each other's opinions about a technique we are thinking about trying. Yesterday I asked my coach to help me think of a way to teach the vocabulary word, *stance*. We talked about using it in context, using visuals, and other possibilities. Then my coach asked me, "Aren't they actually demonstrating reading stances in the lesson?" "Yes, they are," I replied. "Well, can't you have them define *stance* at the end of the lesson, since by that time

they will have had experience with reading stances and they will be able to induce the word's meaning?" "Brilliant!" I replied. "How could I not have thought of induction?"

Such discussions facilitate the recall of strategies to which students have been introduced during methodology classes.

Student teachers also share plans and ideas that they learn from their supervising teachers. One student teacher commented:

> The student teacher tends to assume many of the teaching habits of the supervising teacher. When my supervising teacher reviews my lesson, I am shown how he would teach this. While he is an excellent teacher, he might not know everything or all possible ways. So in walks my coach. She knows how her supervising teacher would teach, and this is reflected in her review. So I'm not getting only my coach's opinion, I'm also getting her supervising teacher's opinion.

Thus a student teacher can benefit from the strengths of two supervising teachers.

Preservice peer coaching also has the potential to widen the scope of the student teaching experience by exposing the coaches to students other than their own. Depending on their assignments, student teachers might not teach students with special needs but may at least observe and coach on lessons that include them. Or coaches may become engaged in problem-solving situations involving a different grade level from the one they are student teaching.

Preservice teachers, supervising teachers, and university supervisors report that preservice peer coaching does assist students in applying new skills and strategies. These excerpts from a coach's journal give a glimpse into how this facilitative effect can occur:

> *September 27*
>
> The benefits of peer coaching are manifold. I have gained such insight from my coach's observations and questions. I feel also that I have been able to help my partner. Her biggest problem so far has been with classroom control. I have been teaching so many "difficult"

kids that I have had a chance to hone my classroom discipline skills. I've been able to share many of my "tips" with her. . . .

*October 15*

I coached my partner again today. I focused on classroom discipline as the target skill. She has done wonders with her class. When I see the suggestions that I gave her and the solutions we discussed in action, I am so impressed and happy! The students were hard-working and orderly. They all used the cooperative learning signal, got started immediately on the drill, and were attentive and interested in the lesson.

## Collegial Support

Student teaching can be a very lonely endeavor. Even when more than one student teacher is located in a given building, time constraints and other limitations often prevent the student teachers from sharing perceptions and supporting each other. Student teachers who work in coaching teams value the emotional and psychological support they provide for each other. One student teacher wrote in her journal:

> Everything is going well so far. Carol and I have become colleagues, friends, partners, confidants, supporters, and best of all, professionals. We have an open and honest working relationship in which we share positive and negative information. Education has become our main focus in our lives; and we discuss current issues, job availability, educational philosophy, psychology, and individual students.

Student teachers need praise; and in peer-coaching situations, they provide it for each other even when the supervising teacher fails to do so:

> Peer coaching is going very well. I have been having problems lately receiving positive feedback from my cooperating teacher on my lessons, but a peer-coaching session is a perfect remedy. As a student teacher, I know how important praise is, especially at a time when you've been thrust into completely new surroundings and are expected to perform. Often, veteran teachers forget how important it is to tell

a student teacher what went well in the lesson before correcting mistakes.

Student teachers report that peer coaching also reduces stress:

> It is great to have coaching without the tension of evaluation. I feel very relaxed working with my coach. She can share her input with me and vice versa, and we aren't nervous. She gives me professional advice without the intimidation of a superior. Our review sessions give us a chance to relax, share our notes, and just talk about how things are going. The morale benefits of this program are incredible. Sometimes there is no one you can talk to because they don't understand what you are going though. This is not the case with my coach. She is in the same boat, so there is that definite bond of survival.

Student teachers who participate in peer coaching will be better prepared for a professional life in restructured schools. The collegiality component of school reform can be problematic. Through peer coaching, student teachers practice resolving and working around personality differences, making joint decisions, and thinking together – all skills required of teachers who work in interdisciplinary teams or with site-based management. One young woman, after a major disagreement with her partner, commented, "I have learned that peer coaching can be a test to see if you are willing to get along with someone with whom you may not always agree."

In general, peer coaching promotes the development of the human relations skills that all teachers need in order to succeed.

## Reflection

For two student teachers, writing and talking to each other about what they observed one another doing serves as a catalyst for real reflection. The peer-coaching process, as outlined in this fastback, appears to facilitate reflection for even the weakest student teachers. Some students go from being unable to articulate a response to making

valid reflections; others begin their peer-coaching experience making superficial comments and develop depth over time.

The use of written praise and questions and non-directive conferencing requires that student teachers be precise and concrete in their reactions. Student teachers bring the knowledge they acquired through methodology courses to the peer-coaching experience and reflect on their teaching and that of their coaching partners. But levels of reflection will vary among students. The reflections of some student teachers never get beyond the technicalities of their specific classroom: "How can you get Mary to behave?" Others venture into reflections about underlying rationales for strategies and school policies: "Would this alternate assessment be fair if you were to teach students with special needs?" or "You prefer a less structured classroom environment than I do. Will this have an effect on our students with different learning styles?"

Regardless of the level of reflection, preservice peer coaching provides practice opportunities for student teachers to begin to develop a reflective stance as a part of their planning-teaching cycle.

## Problems Inherent in Preservice Peer Coaching

In spite of its benefits, preservice peer coaching does have inherent problems. For example, finding time for the various parts of the coaching cycle can be problematic. Time is required for the preservice teachers to conduct their preview conference; time is needed to consult with the supervising teacher about the upcoming lesson; time is needed in the coach's schedule to observe his or her partner; time is needed as soon as possible after the observation for peer conferencing; and then time is necessary for each individual to confer with the supervising teacher about progress.

All this time can be found, but participants in peer coaching have to plan well. A schedule needs to be developed, and it must be followed. Even when student teachers assume only a portion of the supervising teacher's load in order to have time for coaching and reflection, it is unlikely that participants will be able to leave the building promptly at dismissal time. It is more likely that some conferences may have to be done by phone in the evenings, or lunch periods may have to be devoted partly to conferencing.

It should be noted that using peer coaching is also time-consuming for university personnel. Student teachers should be placed in schools in pairs; student teachers and supervising teachers must be trained in how to use peer coaching; and coaching, while in progress during the semester, must be monitored in order to maximize the benefits.

Competition can be another problem. Because peer-coaching partners work together so closely, unhealthy competitiveness occasionally develops. This is particularly true when a weak student teacher is paired with a very competent one. This situation may be further exacerbated by field arrangements in which both student teachers share one supervising teacher.

The supervising teacher and university supervisor need to be sensitive to this issue and, if it arises, they need to address the problem openly. Often students who establish a positive peer-coaching relationship early in their field experience are able to deal with competition if it arises, taking it on themselves to talk about their feelings and to generate solutions. For instance, in one case where two student teachers were assigned to one supervising teacher, one partner felt that her ideas were not given as much time during conferencing with the supervising teacher; the pair decided to request more individual time with her. Another pair decided that some competition was invigorating; they felt knowing that a peer was observing and commenting helped prevent stagnation.

Another problem for some early preservice students is developing the ability to give constructive coaching feedback. One student teacher commented:

> It was easy for me to praise my partner when I coached, but sometimes I couldn't think of suggestions for improvement even if I recognized a problem.

Students who enter peer coaching later in their professional development sequence (during final methodology courses or student teaching) rarely express this insecurity. Students need to be assured that their observations, reflections, and feedback are important to their own growth and that of their coaching partners, and that with experience and training, their ability to give appropriate coaching feedback will improve.

Some supervising teachers also seem to view preservice students as blank slates when they arrive in the schools for field experiences and so question their ability to provide valid reflective feedback to their peers. The ability to reflect and provide valid feedback is a result of a strong teacher education program; therefore, during the training session, supervising teachers need to be made aware, through reviewing program goals and content, of the extensive knowledge base that students develop through their teacher education courses. It also can be advisable to suggest that the supervising teacher and the university supervisor sit in on occasional debriefing conferences with the student teacher and his or her coach in order to monitor the validity of the feedback being shared.

## Initiating Preservice Peer Coaching

If a supervising teacher, school administrator, or university supervisor is interested in implementing peer coaching with preservice teachers, the following suggestions may be helpful.

### Supervising Teachers

1. Find another teacher in your building willing to have a student teacher at the same time that you will have one. Plan a schedule jointly that will allow time for the two students to observe each other and confer.

2. Request two student teachers at once. Sell the approach yourself to the university that sends you student teachers. In many cases, it is difficult for university placement officers to find willing, good supervising teachers; and many would be happy to place two students at a time.

### School Administrators

1. When a request comes for placement of student teachers, suggest that two be placed in your school so that peer coaching can be arranged.

2. If the school is a site for early field experiences, suggest to the university supervisor that students be placed in classrooms together and that they practice peer coaching during the experience.

3. Involve inservice teachers in peer coaching so that they understand the benefits of the process for themselves and will then become advocates for involving student teachers in it.

4. Ask if student teachers requesting placements in your school have practiced with peer coaching during microteaching experiences in their university-based coursework. If not, suggest that peer coaching be implemented during university classes and field experiences.

## Teacher Education Faculty

1. Share your knowledge of preservice peer coaching at a department meeting to see if there is interest among other members in trying the process within your university's teacher education program. Persuade at least one of your colleagues to pilot preservice peer coaching with you.

2. Ask students to use the Praise-Question response format with each other during the sharing of lesson plans and during microteaching.

3. Infuse preservice peer coaching into an early or middle field-experience course. Begin by requiring students to coach on two strategies you teach them in class. Be sure to train the student teachers and their supervising teachers.

4. Pilot peer coaching with two or four students whom you supervise during their full student teaching internship. Ask a colleague to do the same. Be sure to train the student teachers and their supervising teachers.

# Conclusion

The following comment is from the journal of a student teacher who was preparing to move into a solo high school teaching placement after a peer-coaching experience during her student teaching at a middle school. It summarizes the reasons for using peer coaching with preservice teachers:

> The traditional style of student teaching is overwhelmingly exhausting. . . . Student teaching with peer coaching gave me confidence, support, and hope. I honed ideas for Carol; she helped me refine mine. I feel good about moving to high school because it is through this model that I have begun to learn how to work closely with others, to compromise and negotiate educational methods and theories, and to feel confident about accepting new challenges.

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George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as assistant superintendent of schools in Maryland and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

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